

RECONCILIATION AND DIVERSITY IN THE AMERICAN CHURCH

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BY

DEBORAH STARK

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Introduction

When asked if integration should begin in the churches rather than the schools, Martin Luther King replied that Sunday morning 11:00AM is the most segregated hour in American society.¹ Instead of the church leading the way for integration the change came from the federal government. Fifty-five years later the churches remain, for the most part, segregated. In our world of integrated neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces the church body continues to reflect the segregation of the old south and uniformity in ethnicity and socio-economic status.

According to The Multiracial Congregations research project, led by sociologist Michael Emerson, only 8% of all Christian congregations in the United States are racially integrated, or have no more than 80% of the congregation in one racial group.² The church is the only major institution in which segregation is allowable by law, but it also seems acceptable to the vast majority of believers.³ Few congregations reflect the true brotherhood of the universal church where people from every language and every nation worship Jesus Christ. Should this be a concern for Christian churches in America?

To establish an operating paradigm, the greatest story of reconciliation will be examined. Following creation, God lived with Adam and Eve in harmony, walking and talking with them each evening. It was perfect harmony between God and humanity and harmony between the man and woman as they worked together caring for the garden and enjoying one another. But Shalom was shattered when Adam and Eve rebelled against their Creator deciding that they could determine good and evil for themselves. Following the fall all relationships were marred;

¹ J. Klegge, "Sunday, The Most Segregated Hour", <https://www.phil.vt.edu/JKlagge/ConductorChurch.htm> (accessed Aug. 4, 2018).

² Michael Emerson, The Multi-Racial Congregations research project, Rice University, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_congregations_research_multiracial.html (accessed Aug. 4, 2018).

³ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation*, (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 82.

conflict, separation, oppression, and hatred now ruled relationships. It was in the midst of this dissonance that God in love and kindness began to unfold his plan to reconcile humankind and ultimately all creation to himself through his Son Jesus Christ. What meaning can the American church derive from God's work to bring his beloved creation back in union with himself? What was the cost of reconciliation? What was the result?

Katongole suggests Pentecost exemplifies differences are not dissolved but are restored through a new order in which "we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God" (Acts 2:11). The diverse group of early believers who are now "clothed with Christ" (Gal. 3:27) who come from all corners of the Roman world are according to Paul, "no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"⁴ What principles in the New Testament would be instructive to the American church? How does the mandate to reconcile translate into the twenty first century postmodern, tribalistic society of America in 2018? Does it really matter to work toward integrated congregations?

From the springboard of Scripture this paper will examine relevant historical, sociological, and philosophical factors that contribute to the racialization of American society by reviewing the work of Mark Charles, a Navajo theologian, studies by Beverly Tatum, author of *Why Do All the Black Kids Sit Together in the Cafeteria?*, and Pamela Perry author of *Shades of White*, and the work of Jim Willis, and his analysis of the historical and ongoing theological and philosophical causes of racism. We will then turn to Daniel Hill to find an appropriate white response to the historical and ongoing privilege given to whites and the marginalization of people of color. Once the barriers to integration are parsed out this paper will examine

⁴ E. Katongole, and C. Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 70.

multicultural congregation and the ways they overcame the significant challenges to integration. These on the ground issues will be appraised to determine whether the American church can achieve a semblance of the eschatological hope for a universal church filled with people from all nations, all ethnicities, and all languages unified under the Head, Jesus Christ, bonded in love towards one another. Jesus stated that our love for one another in the church would shout to the world that we are Christ's disciples. One wonders how reconciliation between people groups in the body of Christ would impact the larger American society and what witness it would provide for the unbelievers that surround us.

The New Testament

The hierachal social systems and the accompanying power grabbing behavior are symptomatic of the descent into disharmony between persons and people groups after the fall in the Garden of Eden. In ancient cultures the powerful controlled the weak with taxes, debt, and rent through a tributary system that maintained the status quo.⁵ Followers of Jesus were not exempt from power grabbing; James and John wanted to sit next to Jesus in his kingdom trying to claim first place in the line for God's kingdom (Mk 10:37, ESV).⁶ Into this disharmony maintained by systems that kept the powerful in place, Christianity burst forth proclaiming a revolutionary concept that the poor, the mournful, the meek, the hungry and thirsty, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers are the blessed (Matt. 5:3-9). It was a new ethos built on love, for the 'blessed' were to 'be reconciled to their brothers (Matt. 5:24) and they were to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44). This ethic of reconciliation was unprecedented in a society built on domination, military might and oppression of the weak.

⁵ Gottwalt, Norman K. *Social Structures and the Hebrew Bible* Vol. 1. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 15.

⁶ All Biblical references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

Paul's epistles reveal that he spent much of his ministry addressing divisions in churches that often arose from hierachal power structures, so it is likely that Paul's epistles are relevant for today's American church and its deep racial divide. Paul's letters guided the burgeoning Christian community into relationships that were anti-hierachal, built on his theology of Christ who through humiliation reconciled the new humanity to God. From the kenosis of Christ flowed the indicative that directed the Church to live out a ministry of reconciliation in an ethos of love and reciprocal service as the united body of Christ for the praise of his glory. Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 speaks of the bond of love between believers that is as strong as the bond between Jesus and his Father. The unity of believers is the vehicle to make Christ known in the world.

Christ the Reconciler

Paul dealt with division in the church by turning the congregants' vision towards the Savior whose sufferings accomplished reconciliation between rebellious humanity and God (Rom. 8:15-17). Paul contrasts Adam, the progenitor of humanity, and Jesus to illuminate the differences between the old humanity under Adam and the new humanity through Jesus Christ.⁷ He depicts Adam, created in the image of God, as the divider of humanity from their Creator, one who brought sin and death into the world through his attempt to snatch a false equality with God (Rom. 5:12-14).⁸ On the other hand, Christ, who was equal with God, took on the form of a servant, and in obedience humbled himself to endure the most loathsome death of the Greco-Roman era, death on a cross (Rom. 5:6-11).⁹ It was Jesus' death that brought rebellious mankind and a righteous God together, reconciling a Father with his children (Col. 1:19-22, Eph.

⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 141-44. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=2036444> (Accessed December 12, 2018).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

1:10).¹⁰ It is Christ who through his bloodied flesh (Col. 1:20-21) presents believers holy and blameless now reconciled to God, now a new humanity united under a new progenitor, Christ.

Union with Christ Reconciles Believers

Instead of harmonious relationships as in God's kingdom, the early church emerged in a culture built on broken relationships of social and economic hierachal constructs designed to keep the rich richer, the poor poorer, the powerful with vast options and the slave or barbarian disenfranchised.¹¹ In Galatians 3:28, Paul upends these paradigms with a revolutionary concept; "there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, all are one in Christ Jesus," and reiterates this idea of equality despite class, economics, gender, or nationality throughout his letters (Rom. 10:12, I Cor. 12:12). He chastises wealthy Corinthian church members who had hijacked the Lord's Supper to benefit their own self-interests eating first, even getting drunk, while they kept the poor waiting and hungry (I Cor. 11:21).¹² Paul insists that the Lord's Supper is an expression of the unity of believers with Christ and one another for they share in the same loaf, Christ's flesh, and the same cup, Christ's sacrificial blood (I Cor. 11:33).¹³ For Paul, the sacraments of the church, baptism (I Cor. 12:13) and the Lord's Supper, not only represented an individual unity to Christ but they also inaugurated and celebrated the believer's unity with the universal Church.¹⁴

In addition to hierachal divides, ethnic division was deep between Gentiles and Jews. Gentiles, even as God fearers, were forbidden entrance to the inner sanctum of the temple under

¹⁰ Osborne, *Romans*, 141-144.

¹¹ Ibid, 56.

¹² Winter, Bruce, W. *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 144-158.

¹³ Ibid, 335.

¹⁴ Ibid, 335.

penalty of death.¹⁵ Jews were depicted by Gentiles as usurpers of the *Pax Romana*, people to be feared and despised.¹⁶ Paul establishes his beachhead against ethnic division (Eph.2:12-14) connecting the bloodied flesh of Christ to the bond that unites Jews and Gentiles as one new humanity who worship with one Spirit. This new humanity is under the new Adam, Christ, and ethnic, religious, or social class are now meaningless because Christ is in all and fills all (Col 3:9-10).¹⁷ Jews and the Gentiles are joined into one body to the glory of God (Eph. 1:10, 2:14). Christ is the cornerstone, the foundation, of the new humanity and the building takes its shape and structure from him (Eph. 2:20, I Cor. 3:10-11, I Tim. 3:15).¹⁸ In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul expands the believers' union with Christ to all three Persons of the Godhead and so are now able to achieve all that God envisioned for them individually and corporately (Eph. 3:16-19).¹⁹ It is the Person of the Holy Spirit who creates, fills, coordinates, and empowers the body of believers (Eph. 4:4), it is the Person of Jesus who units them in one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4:4b-5, Phil. 2:11, I Cor. 12:3) and one hope of his return (Titus 2:13) and it is the Person of God who is now their "Abba!" Father (Rom. 8:15, Eph. 4:6).²⁰ It is the new humanity's corporate union with Jesus, bought by his blood that brings them into harmony vertically with the Godhead and horizontally with one another.

¹⁵ Thomas R. Schriener, *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 56.

¹⁶ Peter Schäfer Pete and Mazal Holocaust Collection. *Judeophobia: Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Ancient World / Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Ancient World*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997).

¹⁷ Schriener, *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 154.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 34.

¹⁹ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 226.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=3117023>

(Accessed March 18, 2019).

²⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, edited by R. Kent Hughes, (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), 93. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=1059544> (Accessed December 13, 1918).

Paul viewed the church as universal, as One Body, as One Structure over which Christ ruled. The interrelatedness of all the churches motivated Paul to collect money to benefit the suffering saints in Jerusalem as a tangible expression of the unity of the Body in Christ and their mutual love for one another despite ethnic differences (I Cor. 16:1-2, 2 Cor. 8:1, 18-19, 23, 11:8, 12:13).²¹ Paul describes the mutual benefit of the gift (2 Cor. 9:12-14); the care for the needy in the Church is grounded in the grace-gift of God and results in a grace-gift from God for the giver and recipient.²² Just as Jesus “who was rich yet for their sakes became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9), so Church is to give generously to meet the needs of fellow believers.

Certainly these scriptures are a searing indictment of the church in America. Hierarchical structures remain in place and ethnic divisions continue in the American church. The beatitudes mandate a Christian community that is countercultural ruled by the ethos of love and self-sacrifice. The first century church bodies included Jew, Gentile, slave, and free; yet in the American church homogenous congregations rule the day. Christ left the glories of heaven to bring reconciliation between God and humankind yet Americans choose churches that make them comfortable. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus said, it is unity, oneness among believers that reveals him to non-believers. Perhaps this is the reason that the church has marginal influence in our culture today.

The Cost of Reconciliation

Philippians 2:6-11, known as the Christ hymn, establishes the indicative foundation of reconciliation among the members of the Church.²³ Paul writes that Christ “who was in the form

²¹Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians, Volume 40: Second Edition*, Vol. Second edition, “The Collection 8:1-9:15,” Word Biblical Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), (Accessed December 12, 2018). <http://search.ebscohost.com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1524614&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. and Schriener, *Paul Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 333.

²² Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 133.

²³ Schriener, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 170.

of God; did not count equality with God as something to be grasped or seized, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant (slave), he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philip. 2:6-11).²⁴ This model of humility was counter cultural for members of the Greco-Roman society and it is counter cultural now, for a Greco-Roman man or an American man of any status should be self-sufficient and complete, not meek or humble like a slave.²⁵ Crucifixion was the most humiliating, dehumanizing, tortuous form of death and yet Christ chose the cross to unite humankind and God together above the abyss of sin.²⁶ With Christ as the model, Paul moves to the imperative mandate that believers place the needs of others before their own and even choose suffering to reconcile the one who is far off (I Cor. 12:26). Paul urges the Ephesians to love one another deeply (Eph. 1:22), show proper respect to all; love the Brotherhood (Eph. 2:17), live in harmony, be sympathetic, compassionate, and humble (Eph. 3:8).²⁷ It is the humble mindset that begets reconciliation between the powerful and the marginalized.

Unity in Diversity

The new humanity is united under one Lord who flattens hierachal designations and celebrates unity in diversity. Paul uses the metaphor of a body in I Corinthians 12 to help his readers understand this concept of reciprocity. The body is made up of diverse individual members who are arranged by God for the edification of one another.²⁸ Paul joins the different roles of the members of the body with the phrasing bond, “to another...to another...to another (I

²⁴ F.F. Bruce, *Philippians Understanding the Bible Commentary Series*, “The Christ Hymn: Phil. 2:6-11,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1989), Accessed December 11, 2018, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, edited by R. Kent Hughes, (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), ProQuest Ebook Central, 91.
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=1059544>.

²⁶ Bruce, *Philippians*, “The Christ Hymn: Phil. 2:6-11.”

²⁷ Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 92.

²⁸ Richard A. Horsley, *I Corinthians: Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, “Diversity of Gifts for the Common Good of the Community,” (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

Cor. 12:8-10) to make clear the reciprocal nature of their diversity.²⁹ He frames the discussion on diversity (v. 4-11) with a Tritarian affirmation of their unity, the “same Spirit, same Lord, same God” (v.:4) oversees the fellowship of diversity appointing distinctions for the benefit of the whole (v. 12:18).³⁰ Paul concludes with a concrete application of the reciprocal nature of unity in Christ; if one suffers they are to suffer together and if one is honored they are rejoice together (I Cor. 12:26). Paul caps his treatise with the way of love, for it is love that enables the individual parts of the body to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things and it is love that never fails (I Cor.13).

The New Testament Church was Multicultural

The narrative of the New Testament church in Acts reveals the multicultural nature of the early church and its celebration of the diversity of its members illustrated in its specificity when describing church leaders and their ethnic background. Phillip, one of the first who left the comforts of Jewish homogeneity, preached in Samaria (Acts 8:5) and shared the gospel in a chariot with an Ethiopian eunuch returning home (Acts 8:38). Peter, his eyes opened by the Lord in a vision, stepped outside his indoctrinated Jewish aversion to Gentiles and visited the home of a centurion to preach the gospel (Acts 10:28). As the gospel message spread through the ancient world converts from places other than Jerusalem joined to spread the gospel and in doing so men from Cyprus of the Mediterranean islands, and from Cyrene of Africa, stepped outside their ethnic barrier and began to spread the good news among the Hellenists (Acts 11:20). Antioch became the premier multi-ethnic congregation of its time and had a diverse leadership team. Leaders of Antioch included Simeon from Niger, Lucius from Cyrene, Manaen, an imperial insider, Barnabas from Cyprus, Paul from Tarsus; the multinational team had two from Africa,

²⁹ Horsley, *I Corinthians*.

³⁰ Ibid.

one from the Mediterranean, one from the Middle East and one from Asia minor (Acts 13:1-2).

The congregation at Philippi represented socio-economic diversity; Lydia, the first convert was, a well-to-do seller of purple (Acts 16: 14), a slave girl was freed from her spiritual imprisonment (Acts 16:16), and a middle class jailer came to Christ with his entire household (Acts 16:30).

This was the mystery of the gospel in action for the Gentiles were equal heirs, the message was for the rich, the middle class and the poor who were called to a new humanity, a beloved community. It is in this new humanity, that incomprehensible, supernatural love (Eph. 3:17-18) is “expressed in a community of inclusion and faith, through which diverse people find common ground at the cross.”³¹ Their humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and their diligence to preserve unity enables the multi ethnic church to thrive. Because a multi ethnic community will fight against the evil powers of racism, subrogation, and division, unity is only preserved by implementing the full armor of God, and through it win the battle. DeYmaz suggests that it is not loss of love for Christ but the loss of love for all saints that caused Christ to admonish them to return to their first love (Rev. 2:4); it was their unity in spirit that made them a force to be reckoned with by the powers of evil.³² Is this not also true of the American church; it is ineffective against the forces of darkness because congregants do not experience sacrificial love for all the saints? Our struggle to be one is a battle against the world forces of darkness (Eph. 6:12). Like the Ephesians, the American church is called to repent of the loss of that first love and be a witness to all the world that Jesus death and resurrection overcomes the powers of evil, overcomes the power structures of the world so all men live in the light of the honor of God’s image created in them.

³¹ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation*. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons), 2007, 33.

³² DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*, 36-37.

Philemon: The Practical Application of Reconciliation

Paul's letter to Philemon on behalf of an estranged slave, Onesimus, is paradigmatic to address issues of segregation that are grounded in the hierachal constructs of privilege and marginalization. Philemon was wealthy enough to own slaves, he used his large home for a meeting place for the church, and he appears to be an esteemed citizen in Colossae. Onesimus, on the other hand was a slave, perhaps a runaway, without possessions, and without significance.³³ Onesimus met Paul in prison where he came to faith in Christ.³⁴ With his conversion Onesimus became part of the family of God, therefore Paul anticipated a new relationship between the two men that demanded a resolution to estrangement because of the cross (Phil. 3).³⁵ So as Christ's obedience unto death brought reconciliation between humanity and God (Philip. 2:8b) so Paul advises Philemon that his obedience will result in reconciliation and his faith is linked to other believers (*koinōnia tēs pisteōs*).³⁶

Throughout his ministry Paul emphasized solidarity among believers, *koinōnia tēs pisteōs*, and often did so using familial designations.³⁷ Paul views the community of God as a family grounded in the fatherhood of God together with the elder brother Christ.³⁸ It is Christ who creates the congregation as *adelphotēs*, the Brotherhood (I Thess. 4:9, Rom. 12:10), that is united in love (Col. 3:14).³⁹ The community of God is not a “social club where the strong lead and the weak follow passively, but a community of reciprocity, love and mutual service (Eph.

³³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 20-25.

³⁴ Ibid, 20.

³⁵ Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon: Eerdmans Critical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B Eerdmans, 2000), 281-82.

³⁶ Ibid, 281-282.

³⁷ Ibid, 281-282.

³⁸ Ibid, 248.

³⁹ Barth, *The Letter to Philemon*, 248.

5:21).⁴⁰ Onesimus, who was human merchandise, useless to his owner, is now a beloved brother, cherished by the apostle Paul (Phile.11-12). Paul entreats Philemon to do the proper thing for love's sake and value Onesimus as a brother, with his gifts and even his foibles (Phile. 16).

In this effort at reconciliation, Paul acts as the mediator who is confident that love will motivate Philemon to do the right thing (Phile. 9). It is love that creates the new solidarity of the powerful with the powerless.⁴¹ Paul willingly takes on the debt owed to Philemon by Onesimus and in doing so Onesimus' cheirographon of debt is wiped clean (Col. 1:14) and Paul's name is imprinted as the guarantor of the debt.⁴² Interestingly, Onesimus appears to return to his master of his own free will, unshackled but (Col. 4:7-9), willing to risk his freedom preferring reconciliation to avoidance.⁴³ Martin Luther notes that, Paul

“empties himself of his right in order to compel Philemon to waive his right. What Christ has done for us with God the Father that St. Paul does also for Onesimus with Philemon. For Christ emptied himself of his rights (Phil. 2:7) and overcame the Father with love and humility...”⁴⁴

And so it is love embodied in humility that destroys hierachal relationships and builds relationships of reciprocal service.⁴⁵

When in Christ, people groups come together into one body, with equal status before God.⁴⁶ Galatians 3:28 expresses this incredible image of the people of God, “there neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus “(Gal. 3:28). As ‘one man’ the community of God’s people should ‘walk’ as recipients of the grace of God in

⁴⁰ Barth, *The Letter to Philemon*, 435.

⁴¹ Ibid, 358.

⁴² Schriener, *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 216-217.

⁴³ Barth, *The Letter to Philemon*, 358.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to Philemon” 1546 (1522), (Philippians & Philemon: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary), (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 186.

⁴⁵ Barth, *The Letter to Philemon*, 248.

⁴⁶ Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 10. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans), 1963, 91.

unity (4:17-32), love (5:1-6), light (5:7-14) and wisdom (5:15-6:9).⁴⁷ Paul adjures them to maintain unity in the bond of peace walking in humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love (4:1-3). They are given various gifts (Eph. 4:11) but their gifts are to equip the saints for the building up of the body (v.12). Paul interprets Psalm 68:18 christologically; describing Christ as the conqueror who distributes gifts to a procession of worshippers, the new humanity, for the service of the body.⁴⁸ They are no longer a community entrenched in hierarchy but are now reconciled to God and one another, grounded in love and reciprocity.

As Paul praised the Ephesians for their shared faith and mutual love so he extols Philemon as an example of faith working itself out through love for the community of believers(v. 5). In Philemon (v.6) faith and fellowship are joined together in the Greek, *koinōnia tēs pisteōs*, and according to Calvin and Aquinas the word order is to clarify the communal nature of Philemon's faith, his solidarity with other Christians, rather than his individual virtue.⁴⁹ Therefore, as host to a house church, Philemon's relationship to his slave is of concern to the entire Colossian church and the mutual love between Philemon and the Colossians is now to be extended to Onesimus.⁵⁰ His love and faithfulness to Jesus Christ impels Philemon's actions towards his fellow believers. He is transformed through the presence of Jesus in his life.

The word brother signifies not just familial or tribal connections but is often a metaphor for spiritual solidarity or social equality; Paul often used familial designations to describe the relationships within the community of God.⁵¹ The community of God as a family is grounded in the fatherhood of God together with Christ, who is the firstborn brother that creates the

⁴⁷ Foulkes. *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 92.

⁴⁸ G.K. Beale and D. A Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 820.

⁴⁹ Barth, *The Letter to Philemon*, 281-82.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 264.

⁵¹ Ibid, 427.

congregation as *adelphotēs*, a brotherhood (the brotherhood always included the sisters mentioned often by Paul as fellow workers in the kingdom of God) (Eph. 1:1-14).⁵² This brotherhood (1 Thess.4:9, Rom.12:10), is united by love and it is love that binds everything in perfect harmony (Col.3:14). Different gifts were given to believers but diversity within the body is not hierachal but reciprocal (1 Cor. 12:21-25). These reciprocal relationships were unheard of in antiquity and formed an antistructure against Hellenistic social configurations that were based on power.⁵³ Onesimus who was a slave now becomes a brother in Christ but is also a friend, receiving the reciprocal supportive relationship of equals. He who was useless, robbed of status by slavery now has his personhood restored. This letter which makes appeal to the strong on behalf of the weak exemplifies that through personal involvement lives change and evil strongholds of power crumble.

The Challenge to the American Church

Christ as a model of reconciliation and the resulting Pauline ethic is paradigmatic to the issue of segregation.⁵⁴ According to Paul the Church is united to Christ and as one body interrelated to one another, therefore it must establish new relationships based on humility, mutual love and service. Paul probes the motives of the Corinthians who brought their brothers to civil court when he asks “why rather not be wronged? Why rather not be cheated (I Co.6:1-8)? This is the centrality of the Christian message – that Christ took on humanity’s sins, wrongs and suffering and death to bring reconciliation with God. Therefore, it is humility, sacrificial love, and a purposeful choice to assume solidarity with the wounded, that will undergird all reconciliation.⁵⁵

⁵² Barth, *The Letter to Philemon*, 248.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Schriener, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 332.

⁵⁵ Schriener, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 314.

Mark DeYmaz picks up this theme when he claims that the pursuit of a multi-ethnic local church is biblically mandated by the New Testament.⁵⁶ He cites John 17, the high priestly prayer of Christ for himself, his disciples, and those yet to believe. The mission for his disciples, those with him and those yet to believe, are to make God known experientially to all mankind.⁵⁷ In his prayer Jesus lays out the formula for success of the mission. It begins with the unity of the Father and Son and their love for humankind, it follows with the unity of the believers with the Son, and results in their unity in selfless love for one another. It is this self-giving love that is cohesive. Oneness of the believers is critical, Jesus asks his Father for their unity three times because it results in the revelation of Christ to the world. The unity described by Paul is not a social club type comradery but it is oneness as the Son and the Father are one and through unity the disciples of Jesus embody God's love to bring life to the world.⁵⁸

Instead of a united church in America, we have church conformed to consumers who choose their place of worship based on comfort and compatibility with fellow congregants who look like them and have similar socio-economic conditions, thus avoiding messy congregational configurations.⁵⁹ This homogeneity results in limpid faith, a two dimensional Jesus, and feeble gospel. Bonhoeffer writes, “If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, but if it is God who says where he will be then that will truly be a place which at first is not agreeable to me and does not correspond to my nature at all.”⁶⁰ What are the reasons for our racial segregation on Sunday mornings? Are there ways our deeply imbedded segregation can be overcome by the power of the gospel?

⁵⁶ DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, xxix.

⁵⁷ DeYmaz, *Buildin a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 9.

⁵⁸ Thompson, Marianne Meye, *John: A Commentary*. First ed. (The New Testament Library), (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 356.

⁵⁹ Mark Jennings, Lesson 5 Lecture Three, “Postmodernism,” Retrieved from Sakai. (Accessed December 12, 2018).

⁶⁰ Jennings, Lesson 5 Lecture Three, “Postmodernism.”

Social Racism

Mark Charles, a Navajo theologian, cites documents that inculcate the racialization of our society. In 1452, Pope Nicolas V wrote the Doctrine of Discovery, a document that was used to guide the European colonization of the then unknown nations. It declared that European discoverers were to “capture, vanquish, subdue” pagans and “reduce them to perpetual slavery while appropriating the native resources for their own profit.”⁶¹ Thus began the policy of dehumanization of persons of color. The Constitution, written purportedly to protect all citizens of America, excludes women, natives, describes blacks as subhuman and in reality only protected white land owning men. It is a founding document that systemically denigrates people of color. The fourteenth amendment was to rectify the dehumanization of our black citizens but our practices reflected the ongoing denigration of blacks and natives by legislating segregation and deporting natives to reservations. So it is upon a foundation filled with contradictions and inequities that favored whites that the United States of America was founded.

In the post-Civil Rights era, many whites assume that racism is a thing of the past and any reports of discrimination must be isolated incidents. Slavery was tolerated for 246 years, while most white Christians and churches did nothing to buck the system. And then, they endorsed Jim Crow laws that prohibited equal participation in all aspects of the society until the 1960s.⁶² The scar of racism is long and deep. The playing field remains uneven revealed in comparisons between whites and blacks, African American females are four times more likely to die in childbirth, African American males are six times more likely to be murdered and are

⁶¹ Mark Charles, Race, Trauma, and *The Doctrine of Discovery*, Calvin College January Lecture Series, January 17, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYZ2rj2Jooc> (retrieved March 21, 2019).

⁶² Jim Wallis, *America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016). <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=4633424> (Retrieved March 18, 2019), 32.

incarcerated at a rate six times higher than other group.⁶³ Even more telling is the economic divide. The median net worth of white households in 2013 was \$141,900, compared to \$13,700 for Latino households and \$11,000 for black households; in other words, the median white household is thirteen times wealthier than the median black household and ten times wealthier than the median Latino household.⁶⁴

It is plain from these few statistics that American society allocates differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along socially constructed racial lines.⁶⁵ Those systemic injustices have become increasingly covert, are embedded in normal operations of institutions, avoid direct racial terminology and are invisible to most Whites. This insidious racism continues to disadvantage blacks, and is driven by a society built on choice and freedom.⁶⁶ Over fifty years ago, Gunnar Myrdal, an observer of American culture, argued that the “American creed” of justice, democracy, and equality needed to be extended to blacks in order to resolve contradiction and bring about racial equality and harmony. But fifty years later racist and antiracist structures exist side by side thus recreating incongruous lived experiences of African Americans and those of the dominant white culture.⁶⁷ The white American church contributes to the systemic disadvantages to African American and remains largely oblivious to its participation in a hierachal system.

⁶³ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2000, 11-17.

⁶⁴ Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 59.

⁶⁵ Emerson, *Divided by Faith*, 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

⁶⁷Pamela Perry, *Shades of White: White Kids and Racial Identities in High School*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 188. <https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1215/9780822383659> (accessed March 18, 2019).

White Privilege

White privilege is the normalization of white culture, meaning that all other cultures are measured against the white standard.⁶⁸ White people are the only ethnicity who can choose to live in entirely racially homogeneous environments, where they have little or no direct contact with people of marked racial-ethnic divergence, and where their cultural-political milieu is homologous to their sense of what is natural or common sense.⁶⁹ This leads to white blindness, so like fish who do not recognize water, whites cannot identify their own cultural biases and the benefits they have received simply by being white. They only see themselves through the eyes of others who are like them; this is particularly true in the American church. In contrast people of color always experience seeing one's self through the eyes of a white society, they are the 'other,' an outsider looking in.⁷⁰ Rev. Hulian DeShazier, a pastor and hip hop artist, describes white privilege as "the ability to walk away." When the racial dialogue becomes uncomfortable the white person can choose not to engage and simply return to their comfortable milieu.⁷¹

This white blindness is evident in the Evangelical church. Emerson and Smith conducted a sociological study to evaluate the barriers to integration in the church in America. His overwhelming conclusion in interviews with 2500 people found that well intentioned whites, who did not view themselves as prejudiced, actually recreated racialization and inequality through their values and institutions.⁷² Thus separation in the Post-Civil Rights era is worse now; 90% of African American attend predominately black churches and 95% of whites attend all white congregations.⁷³ Beverly Tatum describes the result for both whites and blacks who

⁶⁸ Daniel Hill, *White Awake: An Honest Look at What it Means to be White*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 37.

⁶⁹ Perry, *Shades of White*, 188.

⁷⁰ Hill, *White Awake*, 30.

⁷¹ Hill, *White Awake* 38

⁷² Emerson, *Divided by Faith*, 161.

⁷³ Ibid.

live in hyper-segregated communities. She notes that whites will remain unable to provide any beneficial input to the discussion of race and blacks suffer harm from the concentrated effects of poverty.⁷⁴ Therefore, as she puts it, we live in a “color silent society,” where we don’t talk about race but our behaviors are still guided by race constructs.⁷⁵ According to Hill, it is Christian white blindness that will undermine the process of integration.⁷⁶

The ‘White Evangelical Toolkit’ that contributes to white blindness

How then should the body of Christ proceed? How can the church dismantle the constructs that contribute to white blindness and ongoing discrimination for our brothers and sisters of color? First, the white church must understand the philosophical underpinnings of the racial divide. Emerson defined the “white evangelical cultural toolkit” which contains the esteemed values of the white evangelical that inadvertently builds walls between ethnicities. Within the toolkit is the underlying value of accountable freewill individualism that interprets unfortunate racial incidents as individual events.⁷⁷ The same incident will be viewed by black Americans as systemic in which their black lives matter less than white lives.⁷⁸ This white value ignores the interconnectedness of citizens and systems that lead to inequality. Whites value stories of an individual triumph but fail to see their corporate responsibility to overcome racism. The second white evangelical cultural tool is what Emerson terms as “relationalism” the view that social problems are of poor relationships or influential others; therefore race problems must be largely individual.⁷⁹ The final tool that works against reconciliation is anti-structuralism,

⁷⁴ Beverly Daniels Tatum, “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria”, Lecture, National Center for Intuitional Diversity, November 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DTVj8SfDek> (accessed March 19, 2019).

⁷⁵ Tatum, “Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria.”

⁷⁶ Hill, *White Awake*, 39.

⁷⁷ Emerson, *Divided by Faith*, 76.

⁷⁸ Wallis, *America’s Original Sin*, 14.

⁷⁹ Emerson, *Divided by Faith*, 78.

which is an inability or unwillingness to accept the influence of social structures and consider these types of considerations as blame shifting.⁸⁰ Therefore the experience of the African American who regularly experiences discrimination in every area of life remains strikingly different and unacknowledged. This results in two racial groups who do not define racism the same way, therefore the schism widens, and the potential to overcome it narrows.⁸¹ Because of rampant white denial by whites, the lived experience of people of color continues to be denigrated and with it hopelessness ensues. Denial is antithetical to Jesus' calling on our lives to enter the milieu of the broken, the slave, the poor and walk alongside them in solidarity. This is the sin that must be confessed, one that undermines the essence of another human created by God, who is to be valued by the entire Christian fellowship.⁸²

White trauma contributes to denial and subsequent white blindness

Mark Charles identifies “white trauma” as a rationale for the widespread belief among whites that racism is of the past and we should now move forward. Whites do not acknowledge the pain of persons of color nor do they want to acknowledge their overt or covert complicity in white superiority. Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS) contributes to white fragility which is a lack of stamina for the discomfort of racial issues. According to Charles, when most whites hear of the horrific injustices carried out against people of color they experience feelings of disgust, shame.⁸³ They respond with a deep denial of a contradictory history that claims justice for all and yet massacred native Americans and enslaved vast numbers of African Americans, and then used Jim Crow laws and terror to continue subjugation.⁸⁴ Robin DiAngelo,

⁸⁰ Emerson, *Divided by Faith*, 79.

⁸¹ Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 125.

⁸² Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 104.

⁸³ M. Charles, “Race, Trauma and the Doctrine of Discovery”.

⁸⁴ M. Charles, “Race, Trauma and the Doctrine of Discovery”.

defines white fragility as a “state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves that include outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation.”⁸⁵ Overcoming the barrier of white trauma will call for the self-sacrifice of many comfortable white Americans, to enter a world of contradiction and tension fraught with feelings of fear, guilt, and shame.

To make the leap from the blindness of the water of homogeneity into the rarified air of racial tension whites must move from a color blind theology that says we are one “white” human race, to the appreciation of a rainbow of hues that was blessed by God, to bring healthy function to a body unified in One Father, One Son, One Holy Spirit. Instead of seeing others independent of their racial cultural heritage, differences are celebrated.⁸⁶ Whites must break free of a self that has been shaped by race, and find new ways of being free of the sin of racism.⁸⁷

Americans are interdependent in our multi ethnic society. It will be through the eyes of others that whites can explore their cultural identity and explore historically constituted experiences, identities, and epistemologies and the bearings they have on the construction of white as normal.⁸⁸ This allows for critical thinking and a self that is shaped by our inherent worth to God rather than the white narrative. Worth in Jesus will enable whites to engage conflicting racial narratives.⁸⁹ This reflection enables whites to move past immobilizing feelings of guilt or denial and towards reformulating their identities in ways that challenge dominant interests, cross boundaries, and help develop a range of personal connections and

⁸⁵ Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 37.

⁸⁶ Hill, *White Awake*, 41.

⁸⁷ Hill, *White Awake*, 44-45.

⁸⁸ Perry, *Shades of White*, 185.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

political coalitions.⁹⁰ Scripture represents diverse people who joined the People of God; the list includes Abraham from Ur, Moses an Egyptian-Jew, Ruth a Moabite, Jesus a Jew, Paul, a Roman citizen and diaspora Jew from Tarsus, Timothy a Greek-Jew, Scripture is not a color blind narrative.⁹¹ A critical multiculturalism enables all races to see themselves in the eyes of the other.⁹²

What is the biblical motivation to move from white blindness to multicolored vision? In Christ there is an identity transformation, the heart is transformed, enlivened to the Spirit of God (Col. 2:13) and the mind is renewed (Ro. 12:2). In our transformation there must be an acknowledgement of forces that developed our identity.⁹³ Stuart Hall uses the term transformative multiculturalism which recognizes that all people speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, particular experience, and particular culture but can avoid being contained by this position.⁹⁴ Isn't this the transformation offered in Christ Jesus? Instead denying that one is racist, transformation comes with confession that we have benefited from a racist system that hurts our fellow citizens.⁹⁵ Perry writes that equality must be accompanied by a sense of community, a shared ideology, identity, and vision; it must include critical multiculturalism, understanding of ourselves through the eyes of others.⁹⁶ How much more should this occur in the church for our identity should come through the eyes of Jesus, each of us beloved children in a cosmic family, the family of God. It is Bonhoeffer, the German theologian converted through the preaching of an African American minister, who in the context of Nazi Germany and the genocide of millions wrote of cheap grace that requires nothing of its

⁹⁰ Perry, *Shades of White*, 197.

⁹¹ Hill, *White Awake*, 43-44.

⁹² Perry, *Shades of White*, 181.

⁹³ Hill, *White Awake*, 41.

⁹⁴ Perry, *Shades of White*, 181.

⁹⁵ Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 32.

⁹⁶ Perry, *Shades of White*, 198.

congregant versus a costly grace that embraces repentance, interrelatedness built on love and forgiveness, reciprocity for the edification of others. Costly grace will run countercultural to the church marketing plan, it casts down individualism and it destroys anti-structuralism and opens the floodgate of reconciliation for the glory of God.

Stages of White Cultural Identity; Journey from Blindness to Sight

Daniel Hill identifies seven stages of transformation that move whites from “blindness to sight.” The transformation begins with an encounter that either reveals blatant prejudice is still alive and well, or whites see themselves revealed through the lens of a person of color.⁹⁷ A believer will be tempted to engage in denial or defensiveness instead of acknowledging the truth of the dissonant racist narrative in American that creates systemic inequality that benefits white and disadvantages persons of color into 2019.⁹⁸ The inculcated narrative that whites are superior cannot remain covert, but must be examined and its sin dealt with. A white individual must turn from an identity grounded in a sinful narrative to an identity established in Christ has been infiltrated by the narrative of racial difference.⁹⁹

Mark Charles has identified the cause of denial as ‘white trauma’ or PITS brought on by emotions of guilt, revulsion, perhaps shame. Like Isaiah warns the nation of Judah to awake to their own injustice and then live in peace and security (Isa. 32:17) so whites should awake to the injustice of racism or the ongoing blindness will result in death (Isa. 32:11). Facing the truth of racialization is painful but necessary for healing. Removing blinders to racial injustice will result in feelings of disorientation But the Christian must reject the false idol of superiority and live in the identity of Christ while searching for and facing the sins of white superiority within

⁹⁷ Hill, *White Awake*, 49.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 65.

⁹⁹Ibid, 60, 65.

their heart.¹⁰⁰ Engaging with people of from other backgrounds and skin colors with a determination to tolerate the discomfort of truth will reveal the foundation of sand that underlies the superior white cultural narrative.¹⁰¹ Disorientation may produce feelings of guilt, perhaps even shame. But shame is dangerous and often a sinkhole on the way to multicultural competence. Shame may cause a person to numb out, or reject whiteness. The appropriate response to disorientation is the lament. A lament allows one to admit to wrongs while engaging in solidarity with persons who experienced injustice, genocide, and cruelty. Believers are to weep with those who weep (Ro. 12:15).¹⁰² As eyes open to injustice, we must lean on the grace of Jesus and avoid self-righteousness.¹⁰³ The journey requires commitment, self-examination, and a reality check on treasured values and opinions but can result in liberation from white superiority, the sickness that is in the very air we breathe.¹⁰⁴

Jesus came to heal the blind, make the lame walk, restore hearing to the deaf, and liberate the oppressed (Isa. 35:5).¹⁰⁵ Myopic vision can be transformed through the power of Jesus, enabling one to recognize the vestiges of power more quickly and increase sensitivity to others' experience.¹⁰⁶ When defensiveness is surrendered the evil walls of hatred and dehumanization begin to fall.¹⁰⁷ Healing comes from the feedback from persons of color for we need to see ourselves, the white culture, through their eyes.¹⁰⁸ As whites, one must engage with tension and resist the temptation to retreat to the ivory towers of homogeneity. This includes, with Christ as

¹⁰⁰ Hill, *White Awake*, 97.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 112.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 127.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 139.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 143.

¹⁰⁶ Hill, *White Awake*, 159.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 149.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 153.

our example, touching those who suffer, humbly learning from those who are different, and seeking justice determined to become a change agent within one's own field of influence.

Multicultural Churches

Mark DeYmaz is the premier authority on establishing congregations that reach beyond the walls of homogeneity to embrace a group of believers that reflect the diversity of the surrounding neighborhood. He has identified seven commitments that must be embraced by healthy multi-ethnic congregations. Most importantly, because a multi-ethnic congregation is a countercultural endeavor that fights against evil hierachal constructs, it will only be established by embracing dependence on God (for without me you can do nothing (Jn. 15:4-6).¹⁰⁹ The core group of the church must be built with persons of courageous faith who will abandon themselves to the will of God for the church to be supernaturally produced.¹¹⁰ Second, commitment to a multicultural congregation must be intentional; the mission statement must purpose to tear down the walls of segregation and the church must physically be positioned in diverse neighborhoods of need.¹¹¹ Thirdly, to model equality in diversity, diverse leadership must be empowered. Without diversity in critical areas of leadership, such as the pulpit, the finances, the elder board, the one person of color will appear as a façade of inclusion.¹¹² Intentional diversity must extend to volunteers in every area of service. DeYmaz adjures “We should move intentionally, humbly, and lovingly toward diverse brothers and sister in Christ and these relationships must extend beyond Sunday morning.”¹¹³ Strategic small groups can serve to promote social relationships across ethnic lines where diverse people come to care for one another and commit to

¹⁰⁹ DeYmaz, *Building the Healthy Multiethnic Church*, 53.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 47-48.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 63.

¹¹² DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church*, 72.

¹¹³ Ibid, 83.

relationships that are stronger than misunderstandings (Matt. 5:9). To maintain an atmosphere of cultural sensitivity, church leadership must pursue cross-cultural competence. Cultural competence improves awareness of messages that are tainted with subtle tones of inequality. In a racialized society the recipients of systemic discrimination will view acts of unfairness, injustice, and insensitivity through a racial grid while the dominate culture remains oblivious of the pain.¹¹⁴ Therefore, leaders must remain awake to injustices and if they offend, for it is likely they will, they must maintain a humble attitude, repent, and seek forgiveness.¹¹⁵ Worship, which is a battleground even in homogenous congregation, must reflect the diverse styles of congregant members as an overt expression of the spirit of inclusion. For example, in New City Church, a cross-cultural Presbyterian congregation in Chattanooga, TN, Sunday morning music includes Negro spirituals, Christian contemporary music, a contemporized rendition of a hymn and often a song in Spanish. Multi-cultural congregations demand that people must be comfortable with being uncomfortable for the sake of their brother; living out servanthood as exemplified by Christ.¹¹⁶ Living out the spirit of Philippians 2:3-4, a multi-cultural congregation examines everything to promote a spirit of inclusion. Toys come in all colors, books represent different cultural groups, art represents different skin colors, national backgrounds of congregants are celebrated, printed material is available in the heart language of attendees, and perhaps the church purchases headsets that translate the service simultaneously so everyone can experience the love of Christ together, as one.¹¹⁷ New City exemplifies this intentional act for it employs banners that celebrate diversity; three shades of brown hands embrace the cross. A multicultural congregation must remain outward looking, finding avenues to bless the city, tirelessly seek

¹¹⁴ DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church*, 96.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 98.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 101.

¹¹⁷ DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church*, 117.

people for Christ, engender a spirit of cooperation between churches in the city, and fulfill the Great Commission seeking opportunities to expand its reach into the world.¹¹⁸ For example, Mosaic of Charlotte provided backpacks full of weekend meals for at risk kids who attended the low income high school where they met each Sunday. The witness of a multi-cultural presence in a city compels others to think well of its vision and presence. Its inclusive nature will engender moral spiritual credibility for it is an incarnational approach to join the disenfranchised.¹¹⁹ Only the church can offer ‘peace and safety’ in troubled times for peace comes through the Prince of Peace.¹²⁰ Finally, a multi-cultural congregational leaders must adapt to change and model adaptability for their congregants who must acclimate to each other’s racial and ethnic cultures, and to each other’s religious traditions and histories. Grace is the glue that binds members to the Lord Jesus and to one another, grace is essential.¹²¹

As Paul was willing to assume the debt of Onesimus in order to gain reconciliation so must those in the dominant culture sacrifice so God is glorified. It will require faith, personal sacrifice, and change that is gracious, just, and right so the church will be positioned to share the hope of the gospel in an increasingly diverse society.¹²² A multi-cultural commitment elevates worship from a feel good event to a transformational community that pushes against the white narrative and maintains the unity not from commonality of interests but through the Spirit in the bond of peace.¹²³ Unlike the individualist culture of the white American, Jesus calls his followers to interrelatedness grounded in the perfect unity and perfect fellowship of the Godhead and all believers inherent worth as children of God. This unity will be embodied in humility,

¹¹⁸ DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church*, 120.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 123.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 129.

¹²¹ Wallis, *America’s Original Sin*, 121.

¹²² Mark DeYmaz and B. Whitesel, *Re:MixTransitioning Your Church to Living Color*. (Nashville, TN:Abington Press, 2016), 63.

¹²³ DeYmaz and Whitesel, *Re:Mix*, 63.

gentleness, patience, and love for one another (Eph. 4:2). Wallis describes one practical way he assumed solidarity with the downtrodden; he participated in a protest targeting police brutality that landed him in jail; but in that he joined hands across the racial divide with his black brothers and sisters affirming for them that for him, black lives do matter.¹²⁴ His action was a concrete way of joining in the lament that grieves the injustice suffered by people of color at the god of white supremacy. It is only after woundedness is acknowledged and the perpetrator or a group that represents the perpetrator at the corporate level, repents of and confesses the injustices of the past and present that reconciliation and ultimately justice can occur.¹²⁵

Conclusion

The indicative, Christ who in humility reconciled humanity to God, should birth the imperative, loving care for others in the body across lines of racial division. Paul stood against cultural norms espousing an ethic of love and humility, instead of honor, power, and wealth. In our culture, the body of Christ should stand against divisions that hurt our reputation among unbelievers. Should we not exit our comfort zone and enter into the cruciform paradigm of reconciliation, giving ourselves to bring healing and unity among our fellow believers who were marginalized by the dominant culture? It is not our narrative, our comfort, that “maps the book of the church” but it is Christ crucified who assumed solidarity with the downtrodden who is our model.¹²⁶ If those who are in the dominant culture assume a cruciform attitude and like Paul take on the wounds of the disenfranchised, assume debts that we may not feel we owe, and seek reconciliation then the world will know the power of the cross and as in Isaiah 32 peace and justice will reign to the glory of God.

¹²⁴ Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 114.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 115.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Martin Luther King looked forward to “the beloved community” a people of God, a new humanity, which included all ethnicities, all skin hues, all nationalities, and all socio-economic groups.¹²⁷ A beloved community powerfully envisions a new coming together, a community that welcomes and includes every group, clan, and tribe. Efrem Smith writes that churches should be diverse precisely because Jesus told his followers to spread his message to all nations. Diverse churches also can be filled with unexpected graces, Smith testifies, where people from different races, ethnicities, and cultures learn from one another.¹²⁸ Mark DeYmaz predicts, “the homogeneous congregation will become an increasing hindrance to both the advance of the Gospel and the growth of the Church in the twenty-first century-certainly in the United States. ...We should seek to build churches that are biblical and diverse, taking intentional steps to become all things to all men, so that we by all means win some.”¹²⁹ The multi-cultural church is supernatural and has a supernatural result: outsiders behold the graces offered among members in awe, the mystery of God is revealed, the Spirit of God fills the body of believers, and miracles are experienced. The breadth, length, depth and height, of God’s love is embodied in the gracious love of the congregants for one another; it is a countercultural, anti-hierarchical community that brings outsiders to the foot of the cross in awe for what God has done.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Wallis, *America’s Original Sin*, 124.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 123.

¹²⁹ DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy MultiEthnic Church*, 63.

¹³⁰ DeYmaz and Whitesel, *Re-Mix*, 4-5.

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